

READING

Part 1

Read the text and complete the tasks that follow. Choose a, b, or c. Put a circle round the most appropriate answer. An example is done for you.

THE WORKHOUSE: RELIEF FOR THE POOR?

The Oxford Dictionary's first record of the word "workhouse" dates back to 1652; however, workhouses were around even before that. State-provided help for the poor is often thought to have begun at the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign in 1601 when the passing of an Act for the Relief of the Poor made towns legally responsible for looking after their own poor people.

Relief was first given, in the form of money, clothing, food, or fuel, to poor people living in their own homes. However, the workhouse gradually began to evolve in the seventeenth century as an alternative form of help for poor people, both to save the town money, and also to make it a less pleasant option for healthy strong people who were able to work. In the workhouse, those who were able were required to work, usually without pay, in return for their board and lodging. The passing of the Workhouse Test Act in 1723, gave towns the option of denying other help to the poor and offering them only the prospect of the workhouse.

The threat of the workhouse was intended to discourage the able-bodied pauper from asking for help from the town. This was a principle of the "workhouse test" - help would only be given to those desperate enough to face entering the awful conditions of the workhouse. If an able-bodied man entered the workhouse, his whole family had to enter with him.

Life inside the workhouse was intended to be as off-putting as possible. Men, women, children, the sick and the able-bodied were housed separately. Families were separated. Parents were only allowed limited contact with their children; perhaps for an hour or so a week on Sunday afternoons. The elderly and the unwell sat around in the day rooms or sick-wards with little opportunity for visitors. The able-bodied were given hard work, such as stone breaking. Food was basic and monotonous: watery porridge called gruel, or bread and cheese. All inmates had to wear the rough workhouse uniform and sleep in crowded dormitories. Supervised baths were given once a week.

By the 1850s, the majority of those forced into the workhouse were not the lazy, but instead the old, the weak, the orphaned, unmarried mothers, and the physically or mentally ill. For the next century, the Union Workhouse was in many localities one of the largest and most significant buildings in the area, the largest ones accommodating more than a thousand inmates. Entering the workhouse was considered the ultimate degradation.

Total: 6 marks

Example: Towns first began looking after their poor
 a) when the first workhouse was built.
 b) when Queen Elizabeth was crowned.
 c) when it became a law.

1. How did the towns first help the poor?
 - a) by giving them things like money or food
 - b) by building a large number of workhouses
 - c) by giving them homes of their own
2. Why did towns prefer workhouses?
 - a) It was better for the poor.
 - b) It made them rich.
 - c) It saved money.
3. Families
 - a) were seldom allowed to enter workhouses.
 - b) living in workhouses worked side by side.
 - c) living in workhouses saw each other very rarely.
4. Those living in workhouses ate
 - a) quite well most of the time.
 - b) the same food almost every day.
 - c) not enough to survive.
5. The inmates had
 - a) very little privacy.
 - b) to bathe every day.
 - c) their own bedrooms.
6. The author of the text
 - a) probably spent time in a workhouse.
 - b) is celebrating the history of the workhouse.
 - c) seems to view the workhouses negatively.